

# Southwest Education Academy 510 West 800 South Cedar City, Utah 84720

**November 16, 2006** 





Utah State Office of Education 250 East 500 South P.O. Box 144200 Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200

## THE REPORT OF THE VISITING TEAM REVIEWING

## Southwest Education Academy 510 West 800 South Cedar City, Utah 84720

**November 16, 2006** 

#### **UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION**

Patti Harrington, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

#### DIVISION OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SCHOOL SUCCESS

Myron Cottam, Associate Superintendent

Brett Moulding, Director Curriculum and Instruction

Georgia Loutensock, Accreditation Specialist Curriculum and Instruction

Salt Lake City, Utah

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#### **FOREWORD**

The major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate school growth and improvement so as to increase student achievement.

In these efforts, the school staff makes a comprehensive evaluation of the school's programs, operations, and results. The school determines how actual practices align to stated objectives and resulting outcomes. It is a three-phased evaluation: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, November 16, 2006, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to increase student achievement.

The entire staff of Southwest Education Academy is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the Visiting Team. The excellent leadership given by Principal Dennis Heaton is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence Southwest Education Academy, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more dramatically increase student achievement at Southwest Education Academy.

Patti Harrington, Ed.D. State Superintendent of Public Instruction

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Phone: (801) 5/2-1608

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#### **Support Staff**

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#### **Faculty**

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Forrest Norlin Sombryn Williams

#### **MISSION STATEMENT**

Our mission is to help students rediscover the value and rewards of education and guide them in becoming literate, socially-responsible, lifelong learners.

#### **BELIEF STATEMENTS**

- 1. We believe that in order for learning to take place, students must feel safe and secure.
- 2. We believe that discipline should be viewed as a means to teach appropriate behavior and personal responsibility.
- 3. We believe that relevant and meaningful learning can only take place when students are personally invested in their education.
- 4. We believe that it is our responsibility to help students discover what future options are available to them and realize what they have gained through their educational experience.
- 5. We believe that students can make meaningful contributions to our school, community and world.
- 6. We believe that faculty and staff must serve as positive role models.
- 7. We believe that society prospers when our students are competent, productive, educated and caring citizens.
- 8. We believe that achievements in our school will be respected, rewarded and celebrated.

#### MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Ted P. Lovato, Consultant, Utah State Office of Education, Visiting Team Chairperson

Michele Kersey, Roy High School, Weber School District

Bob Sonju, Pine View High School, Washington School District

#### VISITING TEAM REPORT

#### SOUTHWEST EDUCATION ACADEMY

**CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE** 

Southwest Educational Academy is a highly structured alternative high school serving the Iron School District. Southwest Education Academy, which has been in existence for six years, serves primarily juniors and seniors on a small campus shared with the Southwest ATC and Iron County Adult High School. It is apparent that there is a need for quality alternative services for Iron School District, and Southwest Education Academy, with proper future support, will meet those needs.

a) What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile?

Southwest Education Academy is providing valuable alternative education services to a growing Cedar City area. As an area grows, additional at-risk students seem to surface and need alternative services. Hispanics are the fastest growing group, and male students of all ethnic groups are on the rise.

Demographic data shows there is high mobility, and there seem to be many students in transition for one reason or another. A goal of the school is to focus on individual students, since the school cannot control the high mobility rate.

Poor student attendance is a constant challenge for the Southwest Educational Academy faculty and staff, but they strongly believe that if they get students to class, they can help them succeed. Graduation for these alternative students is of paramount importance to the staff of Southwest Educational Academy.

- b) What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?
  - Collect pertinent data on parent and community involvement and support.
  - Investigate other ways of housing these students.
  - Maintain data on funding sources and their availability, to plan for the future growth of the school.

#### **Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:**

- Investigate ways to seek more professional opportunities for the faculty and administration.
- Seek ways to increase parent involvement in the education of the students. Parents need more direct involvement with the school and its employees.
- Involve the community to a greater extent. Business patrons need to realize the value of Southwest Educational Academy graduates.

#### **CHAPTER 2: THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS**

a) To what extent has the school community engaged in a collaborative self-study process on behalf of students?

The Southwest Education Academy faculty and staff believe in themselves as good educators and feel they provide an environment that is extremely supportive of these alternative students. They have structured the school with flexibility in mind (no packets), and believe a "family environment" exists that supports the students.

b) To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?

Teachers believe the curriculum is structured in the various departments to meet the diverse needs of the alternative student; instructional goals are met **if** students will attend on a regular basis. For several years the school has been unified on writing across the curriculum.

It is apparent to the Visiting Team that the staff is committed and passionate about working with these alternative students. The students have high praise for them and have expressed that they **know** they are learning.

The school staff is constantly concerned about the stability of funding for the school's various programs. The building is inadequate in design for a comprehensive alternative school.

### CHAPTER 3: INSTRUCTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Southwest Education Academy's desired results for student learning are as follows:

- Students will become effective communicators, demonstrating literacy in languages, math and technology.
- Students will connect classroom learning to the world at large.

#### Shared Vision, Beliefs, Mission, and Goals:

- a) To what extent did the school facilitate a collaborative process to build a shared vision for the school (mission) that defines a compelling purpose and direction for the school?
  - The Visiting Team commends the school for the collaborative process used to build a shared vision that defines a compelling purpose and direction. A consensus-building process has been established that involves students, teachers, and the administrator in defining the school's beliefs, mission, and goals. Students, teachers, and the administration were actively involved in the process of developing a shared vision that enhanced feelings of ownership of the direction and purpose of the school. However, the limited role of parental and community involvement was evident, and it proved to be difficult, in this setting, to include other stakeholder groups.
- b) To what extent has the school defined a set of beliefs that reflect the commitment of the administration and staff to support student achievement and success?
  - This has been accomplished to a great extent. The beliefs, aligned with the mission statement, reflect a commitment to student learning. The Visiting Team found, through interviews, that the belief statements parallel the commitment by the administration and staff to support student achievement and success. The students, teachers, and administration feel strong ownership of these belief statements. Implementation of the belief statements is evident throughout the curriculum and policies of the school. Stakeholders should continue implementing these deeply rooted beliefs to ensure student learning and a positive environment for all stakeholders.
- c) To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's desired results for student learning (DRSLs)?

The mission and beliefs are aligned to support the school's desired results for student learning. The Visiting Team verified the commitment of the staff to the desired results for student learning. The DRSL's have been implemented into course curriculum and student learning outcomes to ensure student learning.

#### **Curriculum Development:**

a) To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards and the Utah Core Curriculum (with inclusion of the Utah Life Skills)?

The Visiting Team noted that the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards. Collaboration on curricula is an ongoing effort; such efforts have brought about positive change in the curriculum taught by the teachers. The curriculum is based on the required Utah and Northwest standards that address the diverse learning needs of the students. Some adjustments to State Core Curriculum standards have been made in order to help students acquire deficit credit. Elective courses are limited; however the courses available meet the interests and needs of the alternative student.

The Visiting Team suggests continued professional staff development in such practices as Bloom's Taxonomy, differential learning styles, essential questioning, and effective instructional strategies to develop and refine an appropriate curriculum for the alternative student.

b) To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's desired results for student learning?

The Visiting Team observed that the teaching staff evaluates the curriculum based on student performance and goals. The staff members work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's desired results for student learning, using the results of the WRAT (wide-range ability test), CRTs and UBSCT. Teachers and administration work together with each student on improving test results based on the Utah State Core Curriculum, and celebrate their individual test achievements. The school has recently focused on literacy to support the communication DRSL. Students have been individually assessed (using WRAT) to determine reading skills. The school has adopted the Six Traits of Writing to improve the communication skills of students. The staff has also developed a standardized rubric for grading student writing as a line of evidence and data collection.

The Visiting Team recommends that the school continue to align all curricula to the Utah State Core to ensure benchmarks and standards are being reached and to validate student achievement. By meeting benchmarks and standards, the rigor and relevance of the curriculum ensures each student's attainment of competency in core skills.

#### **Quality Instructional Design:**

a) To what extent does the professional staff design and implement a variety of learning experiences that actively engage students?

Reports by various stakeholders indicate that a variety of educational opportunities and experiences are provided to meet the unique, individual needs of each student. It was clear that each of these opportunities aligns with the goals of the individual students, as well as the school mission and beliefs.

b) To what extent does the professional staff employ a variety of instructional strategies to ensure the needs of different learners are met?

Southwest Educational Academy is clearly focused on meeting the varied educational and emotional needs of each of its students. Classes are conducted in a traditional manner and are highly structured, yet extremely flexible. Additional strategies, including service-learning, individual tutoring, and test preparation classes, are implemented in order to meet the unique educational needs of the students. The effectiveness of these programs is demonstrated by the student comment, "School has become a priority for me where it never was before. I am learning every day!"

c) To what extent do the professional staff and leadership provide additional opportunities which support student learning?

Southwest Educational Academy is clearly focused on individual student needs and learning styles. Classes are offered in a traditional yet flexible classroom setting, as well as through Internet-based educational programs (PLATO), service-learning opportunities, individual instruction, and supplemental educational packets.

#### **Quality Assessment Systems:**

a) To what extent has the staff developed classroom or school-wide assessments based on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement?

The Visiting Team was able to observe that teachers at Southwest Education Academy can constantly adjust instructional practices to monitor student achievement. Teachers have the ability to assess and adjust instruction as needed due to the small class load they enjoy. Teachers' assessments are directly linked to specific teacher instructional use, and student achievement is based on continuous improvement of the learning process. The Visiting Team observed that assessment is both formative and summative.

b) To what extent are assessments of student learning developed using methods that reflect the intended purpose and performance standards?

Teachers and students feel there is a variety of learning offered, and the faculty continually strives to assess students' individual performances based on intended standards and individual student learning styles and goals.

c) To what extent are assessments designed, developed, and used in a fair and equitable manner?

The Southwest Education Academy faculty realizes the alternative student needs constant reinforcement and motivation; thus assessments are designed using a method that reflects the intended student performance standards, which eliminates bias or distortion. Students are told in advance what standards to expect, and teachers work to apply standards on an equal basis for all students.

#### **Leadership for School Improvement:**

a) To what extent does the school leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate and actively supporting teaching and learning?

The administrator of Southwest Educational Academy is thought well of and respected for his leadership and support of the education delivered to students. Even though he is in his initial year of administration, it is obvious that students and staff members feel valued and important.

b) To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative?

The Visiting Team realizes the administrator is fairly inexperienced in his new job duties, but he realizes that decision making needs to be continually collaborative. Progress needs to be made toward a more data-driven and research-based model.

c) To what extent does the school leadership monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness through a comprehensive assessment system and continuous reflection?

Student graduation rates are important to all staff members at Southwest Educational Academy; thus, much monitoring of students' progress toward the goals needed for graduation and the general achievement of essential knowledge and skills is critical.

d) To what extent does the school leadership provide skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources of the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment?

The principal effectively manages operational procedures in a manner consistent with the beliefs and mission of the school. All staff members realize that more solid sources of funding will be necessary in the future to maintain a quality program.

e) To what extent does the school leadership make decisions related to the allocation and use of resources which align with the school goals, the achievement of the DRSLs, and school improvement efforts?

Even though funds are limited, there is a sense among the staff that funds are wisely allocated and expended. As the DRSLs become clearer, resources for the achievement of DRSLs will hopefully become more available.

f) To what extent does the school leadership empower the school community and encourage commitment, participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning?

Parental involvement at Southwest Educational Academy is not strong. The administration and staff will make every effort to get parents to share more responsibility for the overall success of their children.

#### **Community Building:**

a) To what extent does the school foster community building and working relationships within the school?

The school fosters and sustains a learning environment that both nurtures and provides a sense of belonging for each student who comes through the system. This was mentioned many times by the students and parents. It was apparent to the Visiting Team that the community-building process is emerging. Limited parental and community involvement was evident, and it proved to be difficult, in this setting, to include other stakeholder groups.

The Visiting Team recommends that staff members invite and motivate parents and stakeholders to be involved in the school's purpose as an alternative high school. The Community Council and stakeholders can provide information about

specific student needs, and already provides a forum for stakeholders to have a voice in the school.

b) To what extent does the school extend the school community through collaborative networks that support student learning?

The school has implemented a program for the students to assist elementary students with their reading. This has proven to be a worthwhile experience, both for the students at the school and those in the elementary setting. The school has also implemented a job shadowing program to allow students to explore different occupational interests. Students are able to explore different occupations to determine the possibilities for pursuing and furthering their education in a particular profession.

Honest and persistent efforts are being made to involve parents. Evolving communication links have been implemented with the feeder schools. Southwest Education Academy is working hard to engage all stakeholders in the students' learning process.

#### **Culture of Continuous Improvement and Learning:**

a) To what extent does the school build skills and the capacity for improvement through comprehensive and ongoing professional development programs focused on the school's goals for improvement?

The school's CSIP aligns directly with the goals of school district. It is clear that the stakeholders are committed to the mission, beliefs, and DRSLs included in their plan, and are willing to receive additional training to support their development as professional educators. It was reported that professional development days and district in-services, as well as updates on training opportunities, are provided on a regular basis for staff members.

b) To what extent does the school create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement?

The focus of Southwest Education Academy is to "make every student successful." Teachers understand the importance of continuous improvement in meeting the unique and varied needs of their student population. Teachers routinely submit teacher profiles that include Quality Teaching evidence, as well as professional goals for the following year in which the teacher will focus on feedback received from students, parents, and peers

## CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) STANDARDS I-XI

#### Standard I – Educational Program

This standard is met. Southwest Education Academy's instructional and organizational practices, as well as its policies and procedures, support the desired results for student learning and prepare students to succeed in a culturally diverse, democratic society.

#### Standard II – Student Personnel Services

This standard is met. Student personnel services are designed to give systematic assistance to students. The assigned personnel for guidance includes a minimum of one full-time person for each 400 students enrolled.

#### Standard III – School Plant and Equipment

This standard is met. The school shares a building with two other entities. A number of the student classrooms are not contained in the same building. The physical facility provides for basic educational needs through a variety of activities and programs. The need for additional space and a centralized physical facility to include all classrooms was emphasized by stakeholders and observed by the Visiting Team.

#### Standard IV – Library Media Program

The library is adequate in meeting the literacy needs of the students, as well as supporting the curricular needs of the teachers. Computer labs with Internet access, educational novels and recreational reading, and current periodicals are accessible to students. A part-time, non-certified Media Center Coordinator (overseen by the neighboring high school's certified Media Coordinator) provides instruction, guidance and information.

#### Standard V - Records

This standard is met. Student records are maintained, handled, and protected in the best interests of students and parents. Students and parents have the right to access personal student records and are ensured the privacy of such, as guaranteed by federal legislation.

#### **Standard VI – School Improvement (This is addressed in the self-study.)**

This standard is met. The school improvement plan focuses on the total school rather than each of the separate components within the school.

#### Standard VII – Preparation of Personnel

This standard is almost met. Most of the professional personnel are in compliance with the licensing requirements of the state of Utah and are properly endorsed for the subjects they are assigned. A small number (in the Art Department) are working to meet this goal.

#### Standard VIII - Administration

This standard is met. The administration of Southwest Education Academy provides educational leadership, supervises and coordinates programs, and carries out the necessary administrative procedures.

#### Standard IX - Teacher Load

This standard is met. The total number of students instructed by any one teacher in any one grading period does not exceed numbers set by the Utah State Office of Education and/or Northwest.

#### Standard X – Activities

This standard is met. Southwest Education Academy supports a range of activities that supplement the basic instructional program by providing additional interests and experiences for learning to take place.

#### **Standard XI – Business Practices**

This standard is met. The school is financially responsible. Proper budgetary procedures and generally accepted accounting principles are followed for all school funds. The school's advertising and promotional literature are completely truthful and ethical

#### CHAPTER 5: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS – ACTION PLAN

a) To what extent is the school-wide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up?

The school action plan coordinates with the objectives and requirements of the school district. The action plan addresses the need for a better data collection system, and provides for the implementation of teaching strategies and assessment of the DRSL's. The Visiting Team commends the school for its efforts in the development of an action plan. However, the plan does not establish clear and defined SMART goals and benchmarks. The Visiting Team suggests that the Action plan include SMART goals to increase student achievement through evaluation of instructional practices and implementation of best practices. These goals should be Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-oriented and Timebound. Increased student achievement should be the driving force for all decisions made at the school. This should be an explicit goal that can be tracked and reported in real numbers.

- b) To what extent is there sufficient commitment to the action plan, school-wide and system-wide?
  - The Visiting Team commends the staff members for their commitment to the action plan of the school. A sufficient percentage of the staff is committed to the accreditation process and the implementation of the action plan.
- c) How sound does the follow-up process that the school intends to use for monitoring the accomplishments of the school-wide action plan appear to be?

The follow-up process the school has implemented needs to be more specific. SMART goals need to be incorporated into the action plan to evaluate student achievement that is measurable in terms of data, not just completion or program implementation.

## CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

#### **Commendations:**

- The Visiting Team commends the faculty and staff for their strong beliefs and a passion for what they do as a professional staff.
- The Visiting Team commends the school's flexibility in meeting the educational needs of the students.
- The Visiting Team commends the students who seem to know and feel that they are learning. This is due to a strong and dedicated staff and administrator.

• The Visiting Team commends the administrator as an excellent role model who creates a positive climate and culture, and who works collaboratively with teachers in meeting the diverse needs of at-risk students.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Creating positive community and parental involvement is a constant challenge. The Visiting Team recommends that the school seek alternative means of involving parents and the community in the education of their children.
- The Visiting Team recommends the school review and discuss with stakeholders and policymakers the stability of funding sources for the school to ensure continuity of worthwhile alternative programs for students.
- The Visiting Team recommends that, as the physical plant is not well designed for meeting the total needs of the students and staff, and as the school should ideally be housed in a collective setting that meets the needs of all stakeholders, the school and the school district explore possible options for the future.